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## Factors in Modern Sikh History

(Dr. Ganda Singh Memorial Lecture)

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## FACTORS IN MODERN SIKH HISTORY

I am thankful to Dr. Ganda Singh Memorial Society for inviting me to deliver this memorial lecture.

Before coming directly to the theme of the talk today, I would like to highlight some basic facts about the Sikh history.

In the very first chapter of my work, *THE SIKHS IN HISTORY*<sup>1</sup>, I made an observation: "The Hindus have learnt one thing from history that they cannot learn anything". At that time, a thought crossed my mind: What was the position of the Sikhs vis a vis their history? Do the Sikhs learn from their history? Have they learnt from it in the past ? If not, are the Sikhs capable of learning from history ? The basic question that ultimately boiled down was: Are the Sikhs aware of their history? These were the musing of a mature mind.

I must confess that I am not a historian in the traditional sense of the term. I taught history for a year in a college in the University of Delhi during my youth, but shortly transgressed into international and strategic studies. As such, I was deeply involved in analysing the current scene and formulating propositions for framing of policy guidelines in the making of contemporary history. I also kept myself abreast with the ongoing current developments in the Sikh situation in Panjab.

In 1980s when I was commissioned by S. Hukam Singh, founder President of Kendri Sri Guru Singh Sabha, to undertake a rewriting - mark the word "rewriting"- of the Sikh history, I was aware that the

Sikhs had made history, or had played a dominant role in making of history. But they had played little role in writing their history especially in the context of the changing times and situations<sup>2</sup>. A good General not only plans in advance, but also changes his tactics and strategies in view of the developing situation. He always has an alternate plan in case of a serious set back. The Sikh history needed a new outlook in context of the changed circumstances.

I may state here forthwith that I had a very clear objective in penning down THE SIKHS IN HISTORY. I made that explicit in the very first sentence in the preface that I was aiming at a rewriting of the Sikh history, and that too from the Sikh national perspective. The process involved reinterpretation and rewriting of the known facts of history; and giving them a consistency and orientation, so that the facts speak themselves aloud. The higher degree of analytical capacity that I had acquired as part of my official work, helped me to give the facts a sharper focus. They thought that throughout history, only individuals have propounded ideas that have moved the world, made me to persist in pursuit of my work. Now, when the end product is there, it is for others to sit in judgement over it.

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1. Sangat Singh, THE SIKHS IN HISTORY (NEW YORK, 1995) 2nd edition. Delhi, 1996, Pp. xviii 564.

## II

This brings me to come to the fundamentals of the Sikh history.

2. This was notwithstanding Rattan Singh Bhangoo's laudable contribution, and that of Giani Gian Singh, and earlier of Bhai Santokh Singh in the last century, and that of Karam Singh Historian during the current one. Karam Singh has the potentiality to write history in the modern sense. It was his efforts that the Sikhs, after over three centuries, became aware of Jahangir's role in the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev. He also unearthed Qazi Noor Mohammad's Jangnamah which delineates the Sikh character during the 18th Century, and throws light on the Sikh mode of warfare. After Karam Singh's early death in 1930s, his mantle (and material) fell on Dr. Ganda Singh, who in his post-retirement period, especially after laying foundations of PANJAB PAST AND PRESENT, a bi-annual journal, under the auspices of Punjabi University Patiala, did a commendable job in reinterpreting some parts of the Sikh history, and inspiring a host of scholars to do their bits on others. His setting up of Punjab History Conference, an annual get together of established and young fluttering historians was a laudable effort. It is now a dwindling institution, and needs to be revamped, if the ideals that inspired Dr. Ganda Singh are to be kept alive.



The first thing that strikes one in the modern Sikh history is the declaration of war by Lord Dalhousie, East India Company's Governor General of India on eve of the 2nd Anglo-Sikh war in 1848; it talks of war against 'the Sikh nation'. Mark these words. Never had hitherto East India company in its various wars of aggrandisement in different parts of India confronted a nation or even a nationality, based on religious, ethnic, territorial or other considerations. The Sikhs were a nation, sui juris at that, when other parts of India were a conglomerate of regional, ethnic, religious, tribal, caste or sectional loyalties. That was an important factor that came into play in their history.

The other was that Sikhism constituted a distinct, independent faith with a well developed religious thought and philosophy, in North Western parts of India. This was for the first time, after the enlightenment of Lord Buddha two thousands years back, that a faith had germinated that was based on revelation, in this case of Guru Nanak in 1499. It made Punjab, as against other parts of India, a tri-religious state, with Islam, Sikhism, and Hinduism as three arms of a triangle. Whereas, the mughals (of Bahadur Shah's and later Farrukhsiyar's firmans for extermination of the Sikhs), the Afghan invaders (Cf. Qazi Noor Mohamad's JANGNAMA) and the English colonisers realised the distinct character of Sikhism, the general body of Hindus, including their religious Maths. Centres (which had ceased to grow during the medieval period when Sikhism emerged) did not. That created problems on the 19th century onwards.

with the rise and growth of Hindu consciousness, miscued as Indian consciousness. The Sikhs stood much misunderstood in Hindu eyes.

As such, two basic factors in Sikh history were, or are, one Sikhism as an independent faith, and two, Khalsa's emerging as a nation in pre-modern times. I call them basic, because these have been constant, invariable, and central to the Sikh make up or Sikh psyche.

### III

This brings me to the modern phase of Sikh history. By common consent it started with the annexation of Punjab by the English in 1849. The English efforts to extend their stay in Lahore, by seeking a revision of the Treaty of Lahore caused deep schism in Punjabi society.

This gave rise to two types of persons - I am deliberately using the word person, instead of Chief - one owing fealty to the English and the other seething with resistance and revival of the Khalsa power. A pronounced feature of the latter was revival of Khalsa spirit, though it is difficult to accuse the former (those working to English designs) of being cool to the Khalsa revivalism. The difference in attitude towards the Khalsa revivalism was one of degree, depending upon one's priorities, perceptions, and situation in life. The failure of the Sikh Misls to establish a Republic, during the hey day of Misl power in latter half of 18th century, constituted a material factor in inhibiting the forces of revival of Khalsa power.

Mention may now be made of the various main

elements which at different times, and in different circumstances, led the forces of resistance during the 19th century. Briefly, these were Bhai Maharaj Singh, Baba Ram Singh of Bhaini Sahib, and Maharaja Daleep Singh. The fourth element, the rise of puritan Sikh revivalist movement the Singh Sabha, was the other facet of the same coin.

Since adequate attention has not been paid to the contribution of Bhai Maharaj Singh, I propose to deal with him in a bit more detail as against the other two.

#### IV

A prince among patriots, Bhai Maharaj Singh spanned the transition of the Sikh history from medieval into modern period. A saint and a religious leader, he became a revolutionary, and laid the foundations of a Khalsa lehr, a people's movement, to uphold their sovereignty. Bhai Maharaj Singh's sense of Khalsa patriotism was sharply awakened by the English designs to extend their sway over the Lahore Darbar in supersession of the Treaty of Lahore, 1846. Rani Jindan in desperation sought his assistance to ward off the English machinations. Bhai Maharaj Singh, an astute man that he was, to begin with, abdicated from the gaddi, seat of Naurangabad and shifted to Amritsar which straightaway became the nerve centre of intense political activity. His whirlwind tours to the villages, which took him far and wide, exhorting the people not to let the English usurp their freedom, deeply stirred the people. This mass arousal, prelude to people's war, was considered dangerous by the English Resident, Henry

Lawrence, who by mid 1847, firstly, wanted Bhai Maharaj Singh to wind up his Amritsar headquarters and instead shift back to Naurangabad, and, secondly, summoned him to Lahore to answer some charges. Bhai Maharaj Singh read through the Resident's intentions, gave him a slip and chose to go under-ground. In the prevailing situation, his position was like that of fish in the water.

This was not withstanding the English efforts to marshal Dogras and Urban Hindus, and stir up a section of Muslims including tribals against the Sikhs.

It is not the scope of this talk to go into the details of the all-pervasive influence and activity of Bhai Maharaj Singh in events forming the core of the Second Anglo-Sikh war.

Briefly, he raised the standard of revolt and raised sufficient dust about his movements to keep the English off track to avoid premature conflict; organised his own intelligence network and showed his superiority in tactical warfare; moved over to Multan for a week or so, to give sufficient impetus to the forces of Dewan Mul Raj, moved back to central Punjab and sent emissaries all over Punjab to raise a revolt; and over to Hazara by a circuitous route via Shivalik hills to tap Raja Chattar Singh (younger brother of Sham Singh Attariwala) now Governor of Hazara, to bring in a Sikh Sardar/Chief to lead the popular movement; his travels in the countryside to raise volunteers and all the way from Rawalpindi and Jhelum districts, to eventually join Raja Sher Singh's forces. These were all reflective of his

deep sense of hurt at the Sikh predicament, and commitment to the Sikhs ideals. It were his presence that helped the Punjabi forces to worsen the English forces at Ramnagar. This came as a morale booster. And, finally it was his exhortation to the forces at Chillianwala, 13 January 1849, his leading the *ardas*, prayer before the engagement, management of food and supplies for the troops and horses, looking after the sick and wounded, and participation in hand to hand fight, that made Chillianwala the most hard fought battle in British conquest of Hindostan. The English suffered the worst defeat in their history. The contemporary British chroniclers and later expert studies all agree of the English predicament. A recent study by Pakistan's Directorate of Military Operations of Chillianwala Battle opines that had Sher Singh regrouped his forces and launched a night attack, or his father Chattar Singh joined him the next morning, results would have been different. Even then, Bhai Maharaj Singh wanted Raja Sher Singh to fight another battle at Rawalpindi or Hasan Abdal, but Sher Singh lost his nerve and surrendered (14 March 1849).

Bhai Maharaj Singh, like a true patriot that he was, chose to escape, to fight a lonely battle, and carry on the war of liberation. He now moved over to the thick jungles in the interior of Jammu and sent his followers to contact like-minded people in various regions to gauge their feelings. He made an unsuccessful attempt to kidnap Maharaja Daleep Singh who was about to leave Lahore in exile. He busied himself in

making arrangements for a general rebellion, or a people's war, and even sought assistance of Amir Dost Mohammad of Kabul and Pathan Chiefs in the North West. He sought assistance of a cross section of people. After despatch of these letters, he left on a secret tour of of Majha and Doaba to raise resources. He said that "There will be another National War; let all the true Sikhs rise on the day fixed".

When all the arrangements had been made for a revolt at two cantonments on the night of 3 January 1850, Bhai Maharaj Singh was arrested on the information of a Muslim informer. This was on 28 December 1849. Surprisingly, he and his companions were not armed. Even a skirmish would have given him a better place in history and help build up folk literature around his personality. In the words of Mr. Vansittart, Deputy Commissioner, Jalandhar, who effected the arrests, Bhai Maharaj Singh "is not an ordinary man. He is to the natives what Jesus Christ is to the most zealous of Christians." There was a reward of Rs. 10,000 on his head.

It was considered too dangerous to put Bhai Maharaj Singh to trial. That would only have tended to aggravate feelings, and the English were not ready for that. He was quietly deported under Regulation III of 1818 to Singapore, and lodged in a strong Fort with windows blocked out, in the process making it a dark cell. He remained calm and serene, and passed in to history on 5 July 1856, unwept, unsung, unhonoured. The people back home were kept in the dark about the

fate of this brave son of Punjab.

The English, to stamp out the Sikh inner consciousness and cravings of their rule over Punjab, manoeuvred with the new management of Sri Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar to drop the singing of litany RAJ KAREGA KHALSA from the maryada, code of rituals, it daily followed in the sancum sanctorum. The practice continues ever today.

## V

Baba Ram Singh (he succeeded Bhai Balak Singh of Hazro in 1862) was another multi-faceted personality. He was conscious of the deception by which the English had annexed Punjab, and also of the general moral, social and religious degeneration all around. He launched a movement for religious reform and revival. He wanted his followers to strictly follow the Khalsa rahat, code of conduct. He administered amrit to both the sexes together, introduced a number of social reforms, and set an elaborate missionary work. He believed that the Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the real Guru and condemned Sodhis, Bedis, Bhallas, who claimed the status of guru, as impostors. He wanted to consolidate the Sikh power for political ends. He advocated Swadeshi and boycott of western goods and ideals; he was far ahead of his times.

The opening of butchers shops selling kine flesh in Amritsar caused deep resentment both against the butchers and the English overlords. Under misdirected Brahminical zeal for protection of cow, Baba Ram Singh's followers in 1860s killed some Muslim butchers

in Amritsar. The authorities at first interned Baba Ram Singh, but later kept him under surveillance. This was upshot of political backlash, his Namdhari or Kuka movement was taking. In 1872, when some of his hot headed followers, against his express wishes and advice, attacked Malaud and Malerkotla, the Deputy Commissioner Ludhiana, in disregard of orders of his superiors, and without a fair trial, blew 49 of arrested Namdharis by guns; another was cut to pieces. Baba Ram Singh was deported to Rangoon where he died in 1884.

This caused a setback to the Namdhari movement, which politically was an expression of pent up feelings against the English machinations in the annexation of the Punjab. Religiously, the Namdhari movement, even under Baba Ram Singh, had developed certain peculiarities, and despite his protestations, in his letters from Rangoon jail that he was not a Guru, his over-enthusiastic followers raised him to that level. Overall, the Namdhari movement under Baba Ram Singh was like a whirlwind which affected certain pockets only and had limited impact on the general body of the Sikhs.

Maharaja Daleep Singh was, another character who kept alive the resistance in Punjab. He had been converted to Christianity in 1853. But under the influence of his mother, Rani Jindan, who joined him in another decade, he gradually became conscious of his Sikh heritage. But it was not till mid-1880s, his meeting with his cousin, Thakar Singh Sandhawalia, that he decided to be rechristened a Sikh. His being baptised as



a Sikh by the Sikh troops in Aden, and his attempts to come back to India, to be amidst his people, caused misgivings to the British. His falling fowl of the treatment meted out to him, travels to Russia to seek assistance for revival/restoration of his rule over Punjab, and eventually settling down in Paris, were remblings of an awakened mind; these were put to rest in 1893.

An indirect impact of the Kuka movement and Maharaja Daleep Singh's yearnings for restoration of his rule over Punjab was that no Sikh could send his child to London for higher studies, say, for studying Bar-at-Law. During the 19th century, Muslim community from Punjab produced half a dozen Bar-at-Laws, who played an important role in the socio-religious movements and judicial administration of Punjab. The Hindus too had their quota in late 1890s, but no Sikh, not even from Malwas which had a longer interaction with the English, could do so, may be for fear of being tainted for disloyalty, or joining the hostiles.

The first Sikh youth to complete Bar-at-Law was not till the end of the first decade of the present century. By the time, the socio-cultural movements among the Sikhs had far advanced, to buttress the traditional Sikh leadership : it did not permit the induction of people with higher education. I may be wrong, but I have a feeling that that was the main reason why the Sikh leadership remained in the hands of semi-educated, semi-literate persons as against that of the Hindus or the Muslims. Another possibility was that the Sikh movement, especially in the wake of Gurdwara reform

movement, had become rural. But that did not prevent the aristocracy, the Chief Khalsa Diwan and the Sikh National Party from playing a leading role till the death of Sunder Singh Majithia. The rural-urban divide became operative only in 1960s after the eclipse of Master Tara Singh. Anyhow, I am taking the liberty of throwing up some ideas, and it shall be open especially for the upcoming scholars to dilate upon them.

## VI

Mention may now be made of the rise of the pure Sikh revivalist movement, the Singh Sabha (s), in 1873. It aimed at revivalism of Khalsa spirit, and restoring Sikhism to its pristine purity. The Singh Sabha was to shun politics.

The Singh Sabha instantly caught the imagination of the literate sections of the community. It, however, became a movement with the upcoming of Prof. Gurmukh Singh of Oriental College, Lahore, as the moving spirit. Sri Guru Singh Sabhas mushroomed all over the province. Prof. Gurmukh Singh was a puritan and brooked no deviation from the egalitarian Khalsa spirit. This, at times, brought him into conflict with the Amritsar wing of Singh Sabha. A Khalsa Diwan established in 1883 to oversee the functioning of Singh Sabhas was followed by another one at Lahore in 1886, which became the focal point of Sikh revivalism.

The acute personal differences of the three prominent founders of Singh Sabha played havoc with the movement. Sardar Thakar Singh Sandhawalia dreamt of driving the English out and re-establishing the Khalsa

raj; Kanwar Bikram Singh of Kapurthala was a pure revivalist, while Baba Khem Singh Bedi was anxious to get himself recognised and worshipped as Guru. After the death of Kanwar Bikram Singh in 1887, Baba Khem Singh Bedi ganged up the Singh Sahibs of Akal Takht and Sri Harmandir Sahib and other historic shrines to issue a hukamnamah (on 18 March 1887), to excommunicate Prof. Gurmukh Singh from Panth. Though it had no impact on the functioning of Prof. Gurmukh Singh for rest of his life for another decade, it showed the extent factionalism could go and fracture the Sikh corporate body.

The revocation of this hukamnamah at the World Sikh Sammellan in 1995 showed that the head of Akal Takht or for that matter, of other historic shrines, are not infallible. They played a faux pas in 1919 and initiated General Dyer and Capt. Briggs into Sikhism in utter violation of fundamentals of Sikhism. Again, in 1980s the Akal Takht Jathdar played havoc with Sikh political institutions by simulated dissolution of various Akali Dals, and later formation of a United Akali Dal, without at first bringing about the unity in political outlook of the various constituent units. This strand of irresponsibility has now continued for over a century. The present Jathedar of Akal Takht, Bhai Ranjit Singh, in his wisdom, has, however, decided not to interfere in the political processes of the Sikh set ups which remain divided as ever.

## VII

The first quarter of 20th century saw the

culmination of both the resistance and the revivalist movements. The announcement of Secretary of State, Edward Montague, in August 1917, epitomised the former, while the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925, epitomised the latter.

The resistance to British rule had many facets in various parts of India, to wit, the agitation following partition of Bengal, the activity of trio Bal-Pal-Lal (Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai), the revolutionaries starting with Khudi Ram Bose overflowing to Bhagar Singh-Sukhdev-Rajguru, the Home Rule Movements of Annie Besant and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

In Punjab, Sardar Ajit Singh and Ghadrite revolutionaries, who were overwhelmingly Sikhs, played a prominent part. It were the revolutionaries who shook the foundations of the British rule, and brought about a realisation of the futility of British continuing their overlordship, paving way for August 1917 declaration.

During this crucial period, M.K. Gandhi, who later was acclaimed father of 'our nation', whatever that meant, at first by Subhash Chandra Bose in 1944 and later by Jawaharlal Nehru in December 1946, was serving as recruitment sergeant for First World War, and earned the title of 'Kaisar-i-Hind' for his services while Jawaharlal Nehru, in the words of his latest biographer, Americal Professor Wolpert, was busy in his post adolescent cravings and mischief mongering.

The Sikh revivalist phase matured into the movement for reform of Gurdwara administration, and

their liberation from the Hinduised practices and management. During this period, the Sikh movement attained a rare degree of unity and oneness, as was demonstrated by the failure of British administration to find even one, a single, Sikh to side with them over the Sri Harimandir Sahib keys issue. The Sikhs had attained their objectives by 1922, but their lack of application and lack of ability to analyse and take hard decision, made them to unnecessarily prolong the movement. The subsequent Guru Ka Bagh Morcha, Nabha abdication and Jaito Morcha, agitation, were unnecessary and proved injurious.

Right from day one of Gandhi's intervention in Nankana Sahib tragedy down to his being shot dead, he emitted total hostility to Sikhism and Sikh ideals. It is surprising, the Sikh leaders never paid attention to his numerous utterances, much less read his inner mind. This resulted in the Sikh leadership's totally atrophying their movement.

Gandhi was told on the day one itself that his references to the Sikhs as Hindus was offensive to the Tat Khalsa and the whole Sikh movement, but he never desisted from hurting the Sikh sentiments, much less atone for his action of omission and commission. His telegram to Baba Kharak Singh on victory over keys Affair, 'First battle of India's freedom won, Congratulations', was fraudulent in character, and did not make a dent in his outlandish assessment of the Akali movement, or Sikhism as part of Hinduism. He sowed the seeds of schism in the Gurdwara reform movement;

later, Punjab Governor, Hailey, worked upon that lead. The Sikh leadership's deference to him after he fired his salvos on Nabha affair only showed their lack of discernment, what was good or bad for them. Similarly, Baba Kharak Singh's claiming on the one hand the position equivalent to that of President of USA, Germany or France in his capacity as head of SGPC, and, on the other hand, accepting the position of President of Punjab Congress, was anomolous, to say the least, and tended to atomise the Sikh position.

By the time the Gurdwara Act was adopted in 1925, the Sikh movement had splintered, causing untold mischief and hardship. It needed a Herculean effort and Socratic wisdom to push it out of the morass. The Sikhs lacked both. With Master Tara Singh's coming on the top in 1930s with Congress leadership's blessings, the leadership passed on to mediocre hands. Even Baba Kharak Singh who had sought to give the events a constructive turn on the eve of Lahore Congress in 1929, became crazy, peevish and negative in outlook and behaviour.

The Sikhs were in a soup, and one wonders whether they have come out of it even today.

### VIII

Some thoughts on the Sikhs and Gandhi in the context of India's struggle for independence.

With the August 1917 announcement, there was really no movement for India's independence. It was all for placements.

The Muslim League had gained its position at the

Lucknow Congress in 1916, and thoughtfully ran no anti-imperialist struggle. No one suffered a scratch, much less going to gaols. The Congress under Gandhi's leadership ran three movements by fits and starts. The first one, non-cooperation movement 1920-22 was for placement of Gandhi's at the centre stage in the Congress and saw its seizure by him; the second, Civil Disobedience Movement 1930-32 was more with a view to erode the popularity gained by the revolutionaries than against the British : Bhagat Singh, at the time, had gained an advantage over Gandhi in popular estimation; and third, the Quit India Movement 1942, was upshot of Gandhi's misreading of Hindu religious literature, especially Gita, to stab the British in the back when in trouble at the height of the War. Lord Krishna had ran away with the clothes of naked Gopis bathing in the pool of water, and dictated terms to them from an unequal position. Gandhi's move boomeranged, in the process strengthening Jinnah and the Muslim League.

The Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Bills in March-April 1919 had helped to launch Gandhi into the Indian polity. The Punjab administration was aghast at the turn the events had taken at Amritsar, and wanted to teach the people a lesson. Baisakhi, 13 April, was at hand. The Administration hired one Hans Raj, a caste Hindu, to lure the people to Jallianwala Bagh, a closed square with a narrow entrance. It was all a contrived affair. When General Dyer arrived there, Hans Raj was seen talking to the Inspectors of CID (Central Intelligence Department), and disappeared. M K Gandhi

who was entrusted by the Congress to conduct an enquiry came upon the evidence, but he chose to put a veil over it, as, meanwhile he had built up his leadership on the blood of martyrs of Jallianwala Bagh. For Gandhi, to expose Hans Raj's role meant giving away the mileage he had gained. To Gandhi, this type of method was not unjustified, as in his reading of Hindhu Shastras, the Devas (gods) had defeated the Asuras (titans) by dubious means, and so had Pandavas defeated Kaurvas in Mahabharata war.

Gandhi was a scheming and brainy bania, trying to act as a Brahmin. The mantle of Hindu revivalism of Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab brands, had fallen on his shoulders. He personified atavistic nationalism of the Hindus. If the British by granting separate electorate had taken religion into politics, he took politics into religion. The Sikhs had already won separate electorate in Punjab. Gandhi felt aghast, especially at the Sikh assertion of being an independent faith. Even after the adoption of Gurdwara Bill in 1925, he wrote a scurrilous piece terming Guru Gobind Singh as "a misguided patriot", and casting aspersions on the originality of the mission of Guru Nanak. (He repeated these writings after a lapse of 17 years in 1942.) But with what results? There was widespread condemnation of Gandhi's views but the Sikh leadership did nothing to cut umbilical chord that bound it to the Congress or Gandhi.

At the All Party Conferences in 1927-28, the Sikhs did not do their home work. Their advocacy of joint electorate was based on a wrong premise, of their



constituting 25 per cent of the voters in the then restricted franchise. It never occurred to them that their advantage would disappear into thin air, once adult franchise was introduced.

At the Lahore Congress 1929, Gandhi hoodwinked Tara Singh with a lollipop. The Congress leaders had promised to adopt a resolution not to accept a constitution that was not acceptable to the Sikhs. Instead, Gandhi used all his wile to draft an omnibus type one, that Congress would not accept a constitution that was not acceptable to the minorities - the Sikhs, the Muslims, and others. Tara Singh, an ordinary Graduate, without any analytical capacity, was in for such lollipops (till he subjected the Sikhs bound hand and foot in 1947). He was subjected to double talk with impunity. The 1929 assurances were not worth the paper written on, as Tara Singh learnt in post-1947 era.

The plea of the Sikh leadership to the Congress about the quantum of Sikh sacrifices in the freedom struggle - of the people who were sent to the gallows, sentenced to transportation for life, or otherwise imprisoned since Gandhi's assumption of leadership (they quoted figures churned out by Lala Duni Chand, Punjab Congress President in support of their assertions) were all in vain. They were talking to the wrong people; these facts and figures were simply not relevant. The Sikh leadership hardly had fingers on the pulse, and was completely off the track.

Gandhi was dead set against the backward classes conversion to Sikhism. He said, he did not mind their

conversion to Islam or Christianity, but never to Sikhism. Why? If not that he was rabidly anti-Sikh?

Tara Singh was right in breaking with the Congress in 1940 over War efforts. He should have accepted Gandhi's correct advice to turn completely communal and safeguard the Sikh interests, but chose to continue to be tied to Congress's apron strings. A complete break would have made them to charter an independent course, and fend for themselves. His parameters were not clear.

The Sikh leadership showed lack of comprehension of even basic issues both during the Cripps Mission's visit in 1942 and later that of Cabinet Mission in 1946. Baldev Singh (who had once joined a College) was another mediocre, not worth of his job; he sold the Sikh interests in return for his family's business interests in Bihar. Giani Kartar Singh was the only one who could have hoodwinked Congress leadership to yield iron clad guarantees, but was checkmated by Tara Singh and Baldev Singh. Baldev Singh had pangs of conscience only after his ouster from the Union Cabinet in 1952, and wanted to write his Memories as to how the Sikhs were betrayed, but lacked the capability to even do that. Swaran Singh who replaced him at Lahore, and later emerged as Bara Babu at Delhi, had no mind to do so, even with best of persuasion. He said, he did not want to betray the confidence reposed in him by Nehruvian dynasty. He was more loyal than the King, or in Maoist metaphor, was running dog of Hindu Chauvinism.

When the Muslim League adopted the Lahore Resolution, March 1940, Gandhi was quick to analyse that the Muslims would be committing suicide if they do so. In his analysis, Muslims, who constituted a solid phalanx in undivided India, would be divided into a number of segments, if not splintered. He saw in it a rare opportunity to liberate Hindus from the thousand years of thralldom of Muslims. After the mis-adventure of Quit India movement in 1942, Gandhi saw to it that Jinnah keeps alive Muslims' fledgling hope. Gandhi's holding parleys with Jinnah in 1944 when the latter's position was precarious, and conferring on him the title of Quaid-i-Azam (The Great Leader), is to be seen in that light.

After the Muslim League accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan, Gandhi at first bursquely told Maulana Azad, Congress President of six years standing, not to talk about, what he termed, "My Hindus". He then made Jawahar Lal Nehru to say openly that Congress believed in majoritarian democracy, and would in the Constituent Assembly, upturn all the commitments now being made. That put wisdom in Jinnah, but not in the Sikh leadership. Eventually, Jinnah had to, against his best judgement, accept the truncated Pakistan offered to him by Lord Mountbatten. In the process, with Indian Islam being fractured, Gandhi, assisted by Nehru and Patel, liberated Hinduism from a Millennium of slavery. Here was a rare case of double liberation. Not surprisingly, Nehru acclaimed Gandhi in December 1946, while inaugurating the Constituent Assembly, as father of "our nation" - whether he meant 'Hindu Nation', or Congress

party as nation, one does not know. Without partition of India, Gandhi could not have emerged as 'father of our nation'. In three-fourths of India, Hinduism had triumphed, to resume its onward march, after a hiatus of a 1000 years.

The Sikh leadership, during the last phase 1945-47, as stated earlier, was a confused lot, fractured and not sure of itself. It tried to conceal its weakness by convening All Party Sikh Conferences. These in turn, enabled the quislings, turncoats, and infiltrates to occupy key positions. The appointment of Babu Labh Singh as President of Akali Dal in 1945 and of Col. Niranjan Singh Gill of INA, a Trojan horse of Congress, or a power broker, as 'dictator' of Panthic Board, is to be seen in that light. The intelligence Bureau in June 1946 pointed to the "perennial jealousies" among the Sikh leaders, as the main stumbling block. There has been no end to them and characterises the Sikh leadership even today.

Tara Singh had spelled out the Sikh objectives, "to avoid perpetual slavery of Hindus or Muslims". But he drew no contingency plan, much less alternative ones. The leadership instead of facing the issues squarely, was indulging in self-deception. The Sikh leadership was fumbling before the Cabinet Mission on 5 April 1946, when the same day, Jawahar Lal Nehru said at a Press Conference, "The brave Sikhs of Punjab are entitled to special consideration. I see nothing wrong in area and a set up in the North where in the Sikhs can experience the glow of freedom." This could have been interpreted

by the Sikh leadership as a challenge to carve out such an area in the talks with the Cabinet Mission. The Cabinet Mission threw a lot of suggestions at them, of an autonomous unit on the Soviet model (with membership of U.N. on the pattern of three of the Soviet republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) but the Sikh leadership, lacking any knowledge of international affairs and world polity, simply failed to comprehend it. The British found them not worthy of confidence because of their pedestrian leadership, which instead chose to treat whatever Nehru had said at a press conference as a lollipop, which it was not.

The 3 June 1947 announcement of Baldev Singh on behalf of the Sikhs to throw in their lot with the Hindus without getting iron clad guarantees, not even the implementation of 3-way division of Punjab talked about in Sachar-Swaran Singh statement of 21 April 1947, marked the total failure of the Sikh leadership. The Sikhs could have insisted on division of Punjab between Muslims and non-Muslims on the one hand, and between the Hindus and non-Hindus separating a couple of Haryana districts on the other, with, preferably, their joining the Hindus as an autonomous unit. But the Sikh leadership lacked clarity. Penderel Moon at the last moment tried to bring that about, but since Mountbatten himself was angling for Governor Generalship in post-independent India, nothing came out of the move.

Till the end, Akali Dal was fighting for maintenance of India's unity, when both the Congress and the Muslims League were fighting for placements

and power. There were two people who till the end fought for India's unity - the Pathans and the Sikhs. Badshah Khan in the background of Congress treachery and sell out, spoke of his people being thrown to the wolves; the Sikhs lacked a man of that clarity to realise the damage they had caused in subjecting the Sikhs to "perpetual slavery of the Hindus" and their majoritarian democracy. To sugar coat the hurt, the Congress straightaway served the Akalis lollipops in the form of participating the East Punjab Government. That was not unwelcome as the only wise decision taken by the Sikhs during the entire episode of decolonisation of the sub-continent, mass migration from West Pakistan and their denuding the East Punjab of its Muslim content, was still in the process of being implemented. The Sikh settlement in Cis-Ghaggar area, and their trumping up a majoring in a compact area, for the first time in their history, was direct offset of that.

This brings us to the recent phase, the last 50 years of the Sikhs as part of decolonised India, when the Sikhs for the first time in their history came under the tutelage of a reviving Hinduism.

The Hindus right from the day one were very clear about the import of the change that had taken place. The Punjabi Hindu was especially emotive at their, for the first time after a millenium, becoming a majority in Punjab. They had now become the ruling race. They were also clear about their intentions as to the treatment to be meted to the non-conforming faiths. As against that, the Sikh leadership was bewildered,

helpless, and vulnerable.

The pathetic Sikh situation was discernible right from the beginning. Maharaja Yadvendra Singh of Patiala's observations (letter of 5 Sept. 1948 to Patel) about "the sense of frustration and despair" of the Sikh leadership, and the "fear of total extinction" by the youth and their readiness "to make any sacrifices" to ward off the threatening evil, falls in place. He pleaded that "An immediate declaration of the Government of India assuring the community of their rightful place in the body politic, seems to be most essential." This was asking for the moon.

Gandhi right from 3 June had adopted most supercilious attitude towards the Sikhs. He resumed his attack on the Sikhs and Sikhism. This, at first, culminated in Punjab Government circular to all Deputy Commissioners and District Superintendents of Police in October 1947 branding the Sikhs as 'criminals and vagabonds', a lawless people, and "a menace to peaceful Hindus". This circular could have been issued by the Governor only at the instance of the Government of India. Then followed Gandhi's daily diatribes against the Sikhs in his evening meetings. This culminated in Gandhi's final pronouncement on 21 Jan. 1948 to a Sikh delegation: precisely, he wanted the Sikhs to disown Guru Gobind Singh, cast off kirpan and other symbols of Khalsa, and merge into the ocean of Hinduism. Earlier, in December 1947, Gandhi had observed, "Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, and their offshoots are one. Hindhism is the ocean to which all rivers run. It

can absorb Islam and Christianity and all other religions and only then can it become the ocean." This will rank him as the foremost Hindu fundamentalist.

Shortly after Gandhi was shot dead, Lord Mountbatten wrote in February 1948 :

The Sikhs as part of Pakistan would have retained a measure of Political identity. But as part of Hindustan, they fear economic absorption by the Hindus, also religious absorption. In short, they feared, probably correctly, virtual extinction as a political force, and survival only as a rapidly dwindling sect of Hindus.

The Sikh predicament since 1947 is to be seen in this light.

In the wake of Gandhi's murder, the simulated violence that was in store for the Sikhs, were the murderer a Sikh, as was originally feared, made the Sikhs to distance themselves from Hindutva in their manslaughter of the Muslims that went on in the name of communal riots all over India. The Muslims too respected the Sikh neutrality or non-involvement in the Communal quagmire all over India. The Punjabi Hindus too distanced themselves from the Sikhs by disowning their mother tongue, Punjabi language. The Union Government took a malicious note of the Sikhs clubbing a majority in a compact area from Attari to Ghaghar, and also the Sikh preponderance, especially in the senior echelons, in the Army. That made it to take some decisions, never to make a Sikh the head of Army.

Soon the goings on in the Constituent Assembly



(CA) took a turn for the worse for the Sikhs. They were offered inclusion of four of their backward sections in the Scheduled Castes, as ultimate reward for their contribution in the freedom struggle. Tara Singh compared his position to that of a person in a forest, who was disrobed by the Thugs to absolute nakedness; he was offered a loin cloth in return for an assurance that the person would not narrate to others what was done to him.

Sardar Patel declared in mid-1948, PEPSU (a conglomeration of the states in East Punjab as a political unit) as the Sikh Homeland. This caused furore among the Punjabi Hindus of all shades and Hindus press all over India. The concept was soon revered. In order to show the Sikhs their place, Akalis were not permitted to hold a religious conference to commemorate Nanaka Sahib Martyrs anniversary in February 1949 inside Gurudwara Rakab Ganj in Delhi, and Tara Singh was arrested. A general arrest of the Sikhs followed. It was in this atmosphere that, amidst Hindu resurgence, the CA reopened the agreed provisions of the Constitution and adopted the final draft. The Sikh representatives, finding the goings on hostile, announced their refusal to accept the Constitution, and refused to put their signatures to the final document. They were to be kept outside the national mainstream.

The Sikhs saw their salvation in a reorganisation of Punjab on linguistic basis. Since this would meet their aspirations. Nehru, who was gangotri, source of Hindu revivalism or anti-Sikhism, chose to misrepresent it as a

demand for a Sikh State. Nehru was explicit. If partition had not taken place, they could have done something for the Sikhs. In his words, 'Time has changed!' Now all the earlier pledges could be seen only as a strategem; these had lost their relevance. Sikhism was in the grips of a boa constrictor, and he would rather do something to strengthen that hold. The Akali morchas for Punjabi suba were in vain, and did not influence the ruling elite. Twice during the first decade, in 1948 and then in 1956, Akalis decided to shun political activity, to same Hindu leadership to adopt secular attitude, out in vain.

Nehru's talks with Sant Fateh Singh in 1961 showed how illogical and mean he was. It was Nehru who laid down the outline for annihilation of Sikhs, if they were to resort to such type of agitation again. The contours of this outline are discernible from three mindless accusations hurled at the height of Punjabi Suba agitation, to wit, (1) Pakistan agrees to train Sikhs in guerilla warfare, (2) otherwise support and encouragment of Pakistan, and (3) training of the Sikh Youth in the use of explosives. This outline was utilised by his daughter Indira in post-1978 era to organise state - sponsored militancy in Punjab.

## X

Mention may now be made of the communists as a factor in Sikh polity.

Right from the beginning, there was a section of Communist party of India (CPI) or its earlier segments, that was interested in Gurudwara politics. Communists in Punjab had certain pockets in the Sikh constituencies

for Punjab legislature. But they were kept at bay by both the Akalis and Congress, who some times, as in 1937 elections, joined together to defeat them.

After 1947, with the Hindus denying their mother tongue, and the Congress playing to the Hindu Gallery in opposing on Punjabi Suba, Communist support to Akalis tended to give them bi-partisan support. That made Akalis to give communists a sizeable number of seats in Gurdwara election in 1955. They were called Red Akalis. They worked under an overall strategy chartered by General Secretary of Punjab CPI, Harkishan Singh Surjeet who later, was master craftsman of communist infiltration into Akali Dal. The Communists, however, played a dubious role in outsting Tara Singh from Presidency of SGPC in 1958. In the ensuing elections to SGPC in 1960, Communists were aligned with the congressite Sikhs, and both were routed.

Meanwhile, because of the merger of Akali Dal with Congress in 1956, in the 1957 elections to Punjab Assembly, the Communists got about 18 per cent of votes polled in Punjabi region. The CPI came to the conclusion that it can become a mass movement only at the cost of destruction of Akali Dal. (Gurharpal Singh Communism in Punjab, Delhi, 1992)

Consequently, when Tara Singh, out of pique, chose to part company with the Congress over candidates fielded in 1957 elections, some members of the CPI joined Akali Dal on individual basis. Later, when Fateh Singh split with Tara Singh who lacked manpower to organise his faction of Akali Dal, the leadership to

them was provided by Jathedar Gurcharan Singh Tohra. (For his bio-sketch see, Khushwant Singh, A History of the Sikhs, Oxford, 1991, Vol. II)

On the victory of Sant Fateh Singh in SGPC elections in 1965, Sarup Singh and Satbir Singh, both former Presidents of AISSF (All India Sikh Students Federation) stated that the communists had gained a backdoor entry into Sikh politics. Both Sant Sipahi, Amritsar and Spokesman (Chandigarh) have surmised that with the election of Sant Fateh Singh in 1965, Gurudwara elections, or the major infiltration of communists and congressites, there has been a sharp deterioration in Gurudwara administration.

Tohra with the support of solid communist phalanx and the Congressites (to whom the leadership was shortly provided by Balwant Singh), had the potentiality to play an upsetting role. To begin with, he, through the medium of Panthic Unity, in 1970, placed people like Gurnam Singh and Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan, then both in league with the Congress, into important posts in Akali Dal. Chauhan who had been inducted as one of the General Secretaries was let loose on international arena, with the blessings of Indira Gandhi. He floated the idea of Khalistan and raised sloganeering at the U.N. Under media management of the Government of India, this was utilised to malign Akali Dal which, however, suspended him from primary membership.

The Akalis were worsted in 1972 Punjab Assembly elections and shortly afterwards. Tohra asked

for Fateh Singh's resignation. He seized Presidentship of SGPC in January 1973. At the suggestion of Harkishan Singh Surjeet, Tohra, according to Amarjit Kaur (The Punjab Story, Delhi, 1984) placed Marxists and Naxalites at a large scale in Gurdwara administration. Since Indira was working in alignment with the Communists at National Level, the elections due for SGPC were not held till 1979 (Indira had by then been overthrown), when Akalis were working in alignment with the Janta Government. Again, the House elected in 1979 was kept in office for another 17 years thanks to Congress-Communists combination working in alignment during the period, to prevent the rise of new leadership among the Sikhs. The new SGPC house chosen in 1996 reflects a different alignment in the Sikh polity.

To resume the story. With the induction of solid phalanx of Communists in Akali Dal in mid 1960s, the Panthic leadership now could never be unitary as was under Tara Singh, or Fateh Singh. This paved the way for group leadership, with Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, Parkash Singh Badal, Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Jagdev Singh Talwandi being multiple centres of power. This proved centrifugal.

Another fall out of the collaboration of Communists with the Congress was that the two Universities at Amritsar and Patiala that came up became the centres for Sikh-looking Communists, who, keeping Sikh forms, played havoc with Sikh institutions and in exposition of Sikh religion and philosophy at

international conferences. Dr. Harjinder Singh Dilgeer in his monumental work, THE SIKH REFERENCE BOOK mentions of a host of them : those who have propounded the viewpoint advocated by Hew McLeod, who has been in league with pan-Hindus/Arya Samajists in denigrating Sikhism.

To what extent the Akali leadership has been aware of the Communists/Congressite infiltration and its playing havoc in the Sikh institutions, it is difficult to say. Similarly, to what extent the Marxists and Naxalites who infiltrated Akali Dal have shed Marxism and become oriented to the Sikh philosophy, I would not venture to go into. It would be for some one to conduct a specialised study and make his deductions.

In my humble view, so far Harkishan Singh Surjeet who has been main beneficiary, at first in getting Nakodar seat to Punjab Assembly with Akali support in 1950s and then getting in to Rajya Sabha in 1978 with Akali support, is alive and kicking, the umbilical chord that binds the Comrades cannot be completely severed. The case of Balwant Singh Ramoowalia, who was President of Communist Students Union in 1964, infiltrated Akali Dal and was twice elected to Lok Sabha on Akali ticket, and later ran for offices of profit in post-1984 era, and then became a Cabinet Minister in Janta Government as nominee of Surjeet, is a case in point. He mentioned his communist ancestry - that his father was also a communist, but not his Sikh ancestry, that for how many generations his family has been a votary of the Sikh faith.

It is a paradox that though Communism has been losing at international level, by an adroit manipulation it is still keeping its stranglehold over a number of states/parts in India. The CPM which had affiliations with Red Akalis is a dying party, with a bulk of its Polit Bureau Members being over 70. In Punjab it is not much of a force, unless one considers Marxists/Naxalites functioning within Akali Dal who may be at its beck and call.

## XI

The formation of Punjabi speaking state in 1966 was result of the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 when the Sikhs rose to a man to defend the country, and provide the armed forces the necessary support. At the time, Sant Fateh Singh who was on verge of going on a fast unto death postponed it, and the President, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, intervened decisively to concede the demand. But the "For Eyes Only" note left by Jawaharlal Nehru for his successors, quoted by Shastri in his talks with Sant Fateh Singh earlier, proved a roadblock, as it unnecessarily complicated the situation. Then followed Shastri's death at Tashkent. Indira who took over proceeded to complicate the situation so that the formation of Punjabi Suba was not a smooth affair, but riven with reefs. Hence, the Shah Commission, and its topsy turvey recommendations, including keeping Hydel and Power resources outside the purview of Punjab Administration, a number of joint institutions with Haryana, and eventually keeping Chandigarh as Union territory. Indira's objective was to embroil Haryana as

much as possible in Punjab tangle, so that the Jats of Haryana don't think of Jat unity, impinging upon Jat areas of western Uttar Pradesh.

The formation of Akali Governments in wake of the division of Punjab in 1966, at first under Gurnam Singh who later was won over by Congress, and later under Parkash Singh Badal, could not achieve much, as Akalis were either riven by dissensions/defections or the Akali coalition was thrown out by the Centre under the draconian Article 356. Akalis move to rope in BJP was a clever move to reassure the Urban Punjabi Hindus, an insatiable class. The formation of Badal government in 1997 is to be seen in that light. Badal has chosen to say that he would like to use Ranjit Singh's role as a model, in coopting Hindus and others into the administration. One does not know the extent of Badal's reading of Ranjit Singh's administration, especially my comments on his rule. These are brief and pithy. I think, it will be more appropriate for Badal to draw inspiration from Unionist Government in prepartition Punjab. The Unionists had the necessary majority on their own, but they always had a Minister from Hindu National Party and one from one or other Sikh parties - the Sikh National Party or Akali Dal. And, the Unionist Government in Punjab was much more secular and had smooth sailing than Congress governments formed in 1937, or the coalitions that have come into power in Independent India.

Coalition with BJP in Punjab also serves Badal well in letting sleeping dogs lie sleeping, though one



wishes that BJP leaders too would reciprocate. Laxmi Kanta Chawla is a typical Urban Punjabi Hindu representative, forthright and honest in her views. But Balram Ji Das Tandon and other BJP leaders have been in the forefront in taking Ajit Singh Sandhu to the top BJP leadership - Atal Behari Vajpayee, Lal Krishan Advani, Jaswant Singh, Murli Manohar Joshi and others for a sympathetic hearing at his predicament born out of his killings of innocent Sikhs, and indictment by the Supreme Court. It would have been appropriate for some of them to instead pay a pilgrimage to Jaswant Singh Khaira's wife. Possibly, none of them feels that the Sikhs too have human rights.

After Sandhu's suicide, a dozen or so Police personnel indicted in various cases, were on verge of making confessional statements spilling the beans about state-sponsored militancy against the Sikhs as a people. The hue and cry raised by K.P.S. Gill with the full support of the Hindu (there is no national) press and Hindu (where is the secular?) leaders, and the mild, compromising approach of Punjab police, has thwarted that.

## XII

The drafting of Anadpur Sahib resolution in 1973 was the cumulative upshot of Sikh frustration and maladroitness on the part of union government in treating the Sikh people. It was handiwork of S. Kapur Singh of I.C.S., who had suffered the Hindu vendatta because of his Sikh spirit. He was an eminent scholar and a philosopher, with deep grounding in Sikh history.

The draft he put forth is a brief, compact document. It is important, not for what it says, but also for what it conceals. There are certain things which are not said or spelt out.

Kapur Singh represented the Sikh spirit. It was this spirit that stood out against Indira Gandhi's emergency. It were only the Akali Dal which ran a morcha against this almighty engine of tyranny, with even the Supreme Court giving way. The RSS stood for some time and then gave way. This Sikh opposition incensed Indira Gandhi to inflict economic hardships on the Sikhs and Punjab. The Hydel Power Award was one such instrument, which should have been among the first to be scrapped after 1977, as part of emergency excesses. Morarji Desai, the Prime Minister, was a hard core Gandhite and Anti-Sikh fanatic. Akalis should have threatened to pull out of the coalition, right in the beginning. Their failure to do so, proved very costly. Was it lack of consciousness of direction or comprehension, one does not know. This was the first time that Akalis were offered participation in the Union Government after ouster of Baldev Singh in 1952. Baldev Singh was a fiasco. Was Akali participation in 1977 any better so far as Sikh interests are concerned? I have my doubts.

Akali Dal's redrafting the Anandpur Sahib Resolution at its Conference at Ludhiana in 1978 was inept. The leadership should not have felt chary at the resolution being the work of one man. Then, the leadership lacked drafting skill to put down its own

mind. It sought the assistance of Harkishan Singh Surjeet, that clever fox, then termed 'guruji' by some Akali stalwarts; he in turn involved Jyoti Basu. It was a sad commentary on intellectual content of the Sikh leadership. Early in 1940s, when the Sikhs needed to draft a resolution on Azad Punjab, they had sought the assistance of Rajaji. A political party or a group that cannot draft its manifesto or other lead document, spelling out its policy, comes to grief. And that happened to the Sikhs in 1947. Similarly by going by this draft prepared under the advice of Marxists, who were collaborators of the Indira Congress, Akalis did neither enhance their prestige or prospects, nor chose to advance their viewpoint: they unnecessarily put therein phrases, they should have held back. Nothing prevented Akali Dal from adopting fresh resolutions spelling out some of their socio-religio-economic objective without tampering with the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973, and without disclosing their full hand.

Possibly, the group leadership was at the root of the problem.

Indira Gandhi singularly pursued her policy of vendetta against the Sikhs. She and her cronies organised clash between the Sikhs and schismatic Sant Nirankaris in 1978, and sowed the seeds of violence in Sikh polity. These sprouted forth after Indira's coming to power in 1980. What followed before and after 1984 was state terrorism, organised by intelligence organisations and set ups. One organisation did not know that the other was doing. This led to criss cross

movements, all at the cost of the Sikhs. Bhindranwala phenomenon is to be seen in that light; so is with the Operation Bluestar and its aftermath. Indira's use of Sikh revivalism (of Bhindranwala brand) to shatter the Sikh mainstream, had devastating effect. The Akalis regarded Indira as a politically hostile element, while she regarded the Sikhs as an enemy to be defeated in detail. It was this difference in perception that lay at the root of the Sikhs inadequate response. The apogee was Armed forces circular, baat cheet, talking points, in 1984, terming Guru Gobind Singh as the fountain head of terrorism. Every one upholding Sikh values was a terrorist, a potential terrorist or the one looking like a terrorist. November 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom was aimed at annihilating the Sikhs all over India.

Then there was the introduction of drugs in Punjab with connivance of security agencies. This affected the Sikh youth in multiple ways; an Army Officer told me that really speaking the Sikh youth of requisite qualities was not available for recruitment. May be that was so. But that was no justification for putting quotas from provinces into the recruitment for armed forces. Why not the quota for backward classes and other minorities? For instance, the content of Muslims even in para military forces, which serve as vehicle of oppression in communal conflicts, is negligible.

I have given in a greater detail in THE SIKHS IN HISTORY (New York, 1995, 2nd edn. Delhi, 1996), the role of para-military forces and intelligence set ups in organising terrorism and executing terroristic acts, and

indulging in activity affecting honour and dignity of our people. A Director BSF justified the para military force's acts of rape and rapine to cause change of gene of the Sikh people; he little realised that the Mughals under Babur, Humayun, Akbar were not fanatics; the degrees of fanaticism increased with the induction of Hindu blood in Jahangir, Shahjahan and reached its apogee under Aurangzeb.

The Sikhs have been subjected to violation of Human Rights, with impunity.

All Hindu parties, whether Congress, BJP, Communists, Janta Dals of various brands, and other were unanimous that Human Rights are not available to the Sikhs, including the cronies. Even Giani Zial Singh, as President, could not get the body of a relative killed during November 1984 riots in Delhi. He entrusted Madan Lal Khurana to intercede on his behalf or that of the family, to no effect. A Sikh lady, a UK national, and a personal guest of Buta Singh, then union Home Minister on a visit, was implicated as a terrorist, and was released only after British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, interceded with Rajiv Gandhi on her behalf. Buta Singh was helpless. But these cronies, Zail Singh Buta Singh have been men of straw who cannot learn anything from history.

There was involuntary disappearance of Sikh youth for almost a decade. People have been shot dead in cold blood, without questions being asked. According to my analysis of 1991 Census figures, there has been a shortfall of 10 to 12 lakh Sikh youth between 1984-

1991. The process went on for atleast another three years. There has been increase in number of women available in Punjab as against men in a number of districts, for the first time since the introduction of census process. Jaswant Singh Khalsa's figures of 25,000 unclaimed bodies cremated in a couple of cremation grounds in Amritsar and Taran Taran points to that. Since both the Punjab Government, and the SGPC which has the resources, are not interested to pursue the line of enquiry as to the loss of manpower during the decade 1984-94, the next decennial census due in 2001 shall show the impact of this large scale elimination of Sikh youth. Already, in urban areas, Sikh girls are increasingly marrying Hindu boys, as Sikh youth of comparable age group is not available. Then there was large scale encouragement of apostasy under the regime of Beant Singh who acted more like a robot. The Gurmat Chetna Lehr launched in 1996 seeks to stem that rot. How far that would succeed would depend upon various factors.

The question staring at us is, what is the position of Akalis, who represent the Sikh populace, and in whom the Sikh people have reposed their confidence. Writing about Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule, I had opined that "so far as Sikhism was concerned, it gave a big stink" and that "Ranjit Singh's lopsided appraisal of the fundamentals of his state which constituted the basic nodes of his power" was one of the factors for that.

In this context I am not constrained to pass value judgement on the administration of Badal, since

early this year. At the Institute of Sikh Studies Conference a month back, he himself opined that his administration is like a vehicle whose engine is on, but the wheels do not move. Was he showing consciousness of what the people's expectations are? I think he was.

### XIII

The special session of Parliament in August 1997 provided an ideal opportunity for the Sikh representatives in Parliament to record their perception of the maltreatment meted out to the Sikh community in decolonised India, and the economic discrimination to which Punjab was subjected. Akalis had 8 representatives in Lok Sabha. Of them only 3 chose to speak, and except one, according to Sikh press, they did not make an impact.

Why this indifference and lackadaisical performance. They had the facts; almost all of them had access to my work, *THE SIKHS IN HISTORY*, to highlight political aspect at least. They need not have quoted from the book, if they were allergic to some part of it. It gave all the sources; they could have had access to those sources to present their case.

They could have chosen to divide the fields on which each one of them, atleast five-six of them could have presented their viewpoint. But they did not. Why? I don't want to speculate on the reasons.

Thanks to Akalis boycotting the 1992 elections, they did not have a representative in Rajya Sabha. Now in April 1998, seven seats, all won by Congressites in default, shall be falling vacant. If the coalition - Akalis

and BJP can assure that there is no cross voting of their members, they can annex all the seats themselves, or send an acceptable one from opposition to Rajya Sabha. The opposition can win one seat, if all the four groups join together, or there is cross voting by Akali-BJP members. Congress with 14 members can be thwarted, while Akali Dal (Mann) with one member can be made to send its nominee to Rajya Sabha. It is for Badal to think of combinations and permutations, and for appropriate candidates for Rajya Sabha.

Akalis have taken membership of Rajya Sabha too casually. They have sent Tohra, Talwandi and the likes, who were not equipped for that, or they have gifted seats to men like Surjeet, the evil genius of CPM, and sometime to Congress as in early 1984.

Now they can send atleast 5 members with one going to BJP. Badal should not shy away from drafting professionals. Two things essential for them would be ideological purity, and lack of ambition. Besides, all of them should be vocal, and volatile. These could be specialists in international law, international relations/ world polity, services, economics with grounding in international aid and development, Sikh philosophy and history. I am told, it would be foolhardy on my part of tender such an advice, as Sikh leaders are normally not amenable to unsolicited advice.

#### XIV

To conclude, one can say that history has treated the Sikh people very harshly. This is especially with the recent history, the last 50 years of decolonised India.



The failure of the Sikh leadership in 1945-47, was followed by era of Brahminical chicanery, which is still a continuing process, of which they have been victims. They have not yet found a counter to that. The Sikhs have lost their self-image, of their being the lions to safeguard the underdog. If themselves not underdogs, their position in social set up has deteriorated. Persecuted and deprived, the youth, with easy availability of drugs is astray. It lacks positive thinking, and is losing cultural moorings. The leadership continues to function as if nothing has happened. It is as fractured as ever. It seems to have so easily and so early forgotten what happened to the Sikh people for a decade from 1984. A people who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. The Jews passed through an horrendous era, but they have preserved their heritage. The Sikhs are obliterating even their old memorials which presented to the succeeding generations their hoary past. Jallianwala Bagh still has bullet marks; but not the Golden Temple. You can awaken the asleep, but not those who are already awake. The kar seva sants, lacking sufficient enlightenment about the importance of their heritage, have also been obliterating Sikh memorials. The so called Sant Samaj has made big strides in the Punjab villages they are out to inflict mortal blows to the mainstream Sikhism.

In the last chapter 'Future of the Sikhs' in THE SIKHISM HISTORY, I had surmised that in 1999, the Sikhs would be entering a new phase of hope and fulfilment. I wrote that in 1992, though the work was published only in 1995. I still go by my that assessment. Let us hope for a better tomorrow.

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